



STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Gold Star Spouses of America, Inc.

For the U.S. House Committee on Veterans Affairs

Subcommittee on Disability Assistance & Memorial Affairs

June 24, 2025

Chairman Luttrell, Ranking Member McGarvey, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs,

On behalf of Gold Star Spouses of America, Inc., thank you for your continued leadership on behalf of our nation's veterans, their families, and the surviving spouses who carry the weight of both love and loss. Our organization represents a diverse community of surviving military spouses who, despite overwhelming grief, continue to advocate for change and justice in honor of those we have lost.

Gold Star spouses face a unique and often overlooked set of challenges, from navigating grief and trauma to securing education, financial stability, and access to critical benefits. These challenges are compounded by outdated policies and bureaucratic barriers that fail to reflect the evolving needs of surviving families. Through partnerships with veterans service organizations (VSOs), government agencies, and policymakers, we work to ensure that the voices of surviving spouses are not just heard, but acted upon.

We are grateful to the Committee for considering several bills today that aim to improve the delivery of benefits and support to servicemembers, caregivers, and survivors. Gold Star Spouses of America is proud to express our strong support for four of these measures:

H.R. 2055: Caring for Survivors Act

One of the most urgent challenges facing military surviving spouses is the glaring disparity between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and survivor benefits for federal civilian employees. Currently, DIC provides just 43% of the compensation that a 100% service-connected disabled veteran receives from the VA. Meanwhile, federal civilian employees have the choice to designate up to 55% of their compensation as a death benefit for their spouse.

This inequity leaves military surviving spouses at a severe financial disadvantage, despite their loved ones making the ultimate sacrifice in service to our nation. To correct this imbalance, DIC must be increased to 55% of a 100% disabled veteran's disability compensation, ensuring that military families receive the fair and just support they were promised. It's time for Congress to fulfill its promise to those who have given everything for our country and pass the Caring for Survivors Act.

Many service members enlist under the belief that if something happens to them, their families will be cared for. The reality is vastly different. Many service members and veterans are unaware of the staggering financial loss their families will face when they pass away. For example, an active-duty E-1 service member stationed in Norfolk, VA, earns \$2,108.10 per month in base pay. With the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), their total monthly income is \$4,262.10. Similarly, a 100% service-connected disabled veteran with a spouse receives \$4,044.91 per month in VA compensation.

However, when that service member or veteran dies, their family's financial stability is shattered. The VA replaces their income with DIC, which currently stands at just \$1,653.06 per month, a devastating drop in support that often leads to severe financial hardship for the surviving spouse and their family.

When these benefits are cut, the pain is not just emotional but financial. Surviving spouses are still paying the same rent, the same utility bills, and the same everyday costs of living, but with drastically reduced resources. Their expenses are not slashed by 59%, but their means of survival are. In the midst of profound loss, they are forced to navigate not only the grief of losing a loved one but also the harsh

reality of economic insecurity. This is not just a policy flaw, it is a failure to uphold our promise to those who have sacrificed for this country.

The families of those who laid down their lives in service to our nation deserve nothing less than equal benefits to those of federal employees. It's time to honor their sacrifice with the full and fair compensation they have rightfully earned. This legislation does not grant Gold Star families a life of luxury, it simply aligns their benefits with the standard set by the Office of Personnel Management, ensuring their sacrifice is not valued less than that of civilian government employees.

Gold Star Spouses of America is grateful to Representative Jahana Hayes for her leadership in championing this bill. Now, it's time to see it cross the finish line.

Draft Bill: Justice for America's Veterans and Survivors Act

Invisible wounds can be just as fatal as physical ones. Too often, the families of veterans lost to suicide or self-inflicted harm are left without closure, and without access to the benefits they deserve, because the cause of death is misclassified or never formally recognized.

The Justice for America's Veterans and Survivors Act takes a vital step forward by requiring the VA to collect and report accurate, annual data on veteran deaths, including those involving suicide. Without this information, we cannot craft effective policy, deploy targeted prevention efforts, or support the families left behind.

We cannot afford to operate in the dark. This legislation equips policymakers, providers, and support networks with essential tools and signals a meaningful commitment to transparency and accountability. We urge the Committee to support this bill. It is not just good policy; it is a moral imperative.

H.R. 2701: Fallen Servicemembers Religious Heritage Restoration Act

We are proud to support the Fallen Servicemembers Religious Heritage Restoration Act, which upholds the dignity and faith of Jewish-American servicemembers buried overseas. By establishing a 10-year program within the American Battle Monuments Commission to identify and correct religious misrepresentations on grave markers, this bill helps right historical wrongs while honoring the individual identities of our fallen.

Accurate grave markers are not just symbolic, they are essential for the healing and remembrance of surviving families. When a headstone reflects a loved one's true faith and heritage, it provides comfort, closure, and lasting recognition. Gold Star Spouses of America thanks the many champions of this legislation for their thoughtful approach and urges swift passage.

H.R. 2721: Honoring Our Heroes Act

Many veterans, particularly from older generations, lie in unmarked graves without the headstones or markers they earned through service. The Honoring Our Heroes Act offers long-overdue recognition by allowing surviving families to request official markers through the VA, ensuring that these heroes are not forgotten.

The bill also updates public eligibility information, making it easier for families to learn about and access this benefit. These changes are more than administrative, they are acts of remembrance. They restore honor where it has long been denied. We strongly support this pilot program and its potential to bring healing to families across the country.

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We thank you again for your dedication to the well-being of veterans, their families, and the survivors they leave behind. Our work is rooted in the belief that honoring the dead must go hand-in-hand with supporting the living. These bills offer tangible progress toward that goal.

As Reverend Warnock so aptly stated:

The men and women in our military serve our country courageously—and their spouses serve our country, too. If one of our heroes loses their life in the line of duty, we should honor our servicemember's sacrifice by ensuring their spouse can retain survivor benefits if they choose to remarry.

We stand ready to partner with you to advance these proposals and fulfill the promises made to our military families.

Gold Star Spouses of America, Inc.

Gold Star Spouses of America is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the surviving spouses of military service members and veterans who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our country. Our mission is to provide meaningful support, advocacy, education, and a sense of community for Gold Star families. Through our programs, we work to ensure that the needs of these spouses and their families are heard, addressed, and prioritized by policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels.

GSSA is listed as an approved resource in the National Resource Directory (NRD.gov) and has been approved by the Department of Defense as a resource on Military OneSource and in the “Days Ahead” binder for all active-duty losses.

GSSA is also recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs for volunteer opportunities within the department’s Center for Development and Civic Engagement.